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NEWS RELEASE

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Oct. 14, 1998

Contact: Steve Seninger, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, (406) 243-5113.

MONTANA'S USE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE HIGHER THAN U.S. AVERAGE MISSOULA--

Montanans use non-traditional, alternative medicine at much higher rates than do health care consumers nationally, according to the latest Montana Poll conducted by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at The University of Montana-Missoula.

Steve Seninger, director of the bureau's Health Industry Research Program, said Montana's strong demand for alternative medicine is driven by several factors: a health-conscious population that is interested in holistic health, increased acceptance by the National Institutes of Health of alternative treatments such as acupuncture for pain-related health conditions, and increased involvement by medical doctors in alternative medicine.

The Montana Poll showed that 59 percent of Montanans use some form of alternative medicine compared to only 40 percent nationally, as reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Alternative medicine ranges from chiropractic services to acupuncture to spiritual healing to exercise and diet.

Conducted in conjunction with UM's upcoming 1998 Mansfield Conference, "The Healing Arts in American and Asian Cultures," the Montana Poll interviewed about 398 Montanans statewide, questioning them about their use of alternative medicine, as well as about concerns and priorities surrounding death and dying.

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Montana's alternative medicine consumers are highly educated, with one-third of the poll's respondents reporting a college degree and one-half reporting household incomes of more than \$35,000.

The Montana Poll found that:

- Montanans used herbal therapies more frequently than national consumers.
- 20 percent of Montanans who indicated they use some type of alternative medicine used relaxation techniques, massage therapy, and spiritual healing in conjunction with conventional medicine.
- 14 percent of the state's alternative medicine consumers reported that their doctor referred them to exercise/movement and lifestyle/diet therapies.
- exercise and diet/lifestyle were two of the most frequently used alternative therapies in Montana and throughout the United States.

National expenditures on alternative medicine are currently about \$24 billion and growing at more than 15 percent per year, with more than three-fourths of the cost paid out of pocket by consumers, Seninger said.

In Montana, only one insurer—Blue Cross Blue Shield—covers both chiropractic and acupuncture treatments, he said. Outside of Montana, health plans such as Blue Shield of California and the Connecticut-based Oxford Health Plan are offering limited coverage of alternative medicine to their customers. Other alternative therapies — including herbal therapy, homeopathy or massage therapy — are not currently covered by health insurance plans in Montana.

The Montana Poll also asked Montanans about concerns and priorities surrounding

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death and dying. On those subjects, Seninger said, Montanans are most concerned about reconciliation with family members and prior directives on medical and spiritual treatment in the event of physical or mental incapacity at the end of life.

Concern about reconciliation and prior directives were ranked higher than concerns about pain control or leaving financial burdens behind, he said.

The poll found that persons without health insurance were more concerned about leaving financial burdens behind at death, compared to those with health insurance. There were no significant differences between urban and rural Montana on concerns about the presence of family or the availability of care-giving support at the end of life.

The Montana Poll is a statewide telephone survey conducted by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research. The respondents are chosen randomly and represent a cross section of Montana adults. This Montana Poll was conducted Sept. 10-21. There were 398 respondents, yielding error margin of plus or minus 5 percentage points for the entire sample.

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